The Westgate School Sixth Form

Student UCAS Handbook 2020-2021

www.ucas.com

Student UCAS Handbook

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1. Applying for Higher Education Courses

1.1 Using this Handbook

Applying for a higher education course is one of the most exciting and important times in your life. It can also be overwhelming and rather complicated.

This handbook is designed to provide guidance for students on writing good personal statements and provide information on how to research and find out more about university qualifications and other post 16 options.

Alongside this handbook, there are plenty of resources and materials which you can access online to assist with the UCAS application process, including the UCAS website www.ucas.com. A full list of these is provided at the back of this handbook.

1.2 What does the UCAS application include?

You make your application through the UCAS online system, Apply. You don't need to do it all at once – you can save your progress and sign back in anytime.

For more information about the steps of the UCAS application, please see the link below:

https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/filling-your-ucas-undergraduate-application

1.3 Timeline of Application

You should have already started thinking about the potential universities and courses you are interested in. Hopefully attending the UCAS Exhibition gave you the opportunity to ask questions and collect information from a range of universities.

Each student will be assigned a member of staff to assist you with your university application whilst we are not in school. The first task you need to complete will be to send the course option that you are thinking of undertaking to your assigned member of staff (This needs to be done by 8th May). This doesn't have to be your final, definite choice and this may change but it will help staff to advise you appropriately and make feedback more specific to your chosen path.

22nd May 2020 – the first draft of your personal statement will need to be written and sent to staff for feedback.

13th July 2020 – a second draft, taking into consideration and acting on feedback will need to be submitted. You will receive feedback from teachers by 20th July.

18th September 2020 – the final draft of your personal statement needs to be submitted.

2. Writing a Personal Statement

2.1 What is a Personal Statement?

The personal statement is an important part of your UCAS application. A personal statement supports your application to study at a university or college. It's a chance for you to articulate why you'd like to study a particular course or subject, and what skills and experience you possess that show your passion for your chosen field. A personal statement is what sets up an accurate portrayal of your character to universities.

2.2 Where do I start when writing a personal statement?

You can only write one personal statement for all your choices, so don't mention a university or college by name in the application. If you are applying to different courses/subjects, you will need to ensure that the information you include is relevant to both.

Check university and college websites to see what skills and qualities they'd like you to have.

Make a list of things you want to include. You could start by thinking about the things that you have done and the things you have achieved in your life. Write them down or make a mind map of all your interests, qualities, skills, hobbies and experiences.

Start drafting early – even if you are not yet sure about the course or the university you want to apply for you will still be able to make a start on your personal statement by writing about your current education, hobbies, interests and experiences.

2.3 What structure or format should I follow when my personal statement?

Your personal statement should be unique, so there's no definite format for you to follow. However, in order to make sure you include everything you need to, and that your personal statement is structured in a logical and coherent flow, the following structure is recommended:

Paragraph One: Why this course? Briefly discuss the reasons for choosing the course, explaining why the subject is significant to society, personal reasons to study the course, focus on specific areas within the course. This is just an introduction and should be no more than a few lines.

Paragraph Two and Three: What would make you a good student? Why do you think you're suitable for the course? Do you have any particular skills and experience that will help you to succeed on the course? Explain a link between current studies and chosen university course. Are there any transferable skills you have developed at sixth form, and how these will be applied during undergraduate studies?

What wider reading or activities have you got involved in to broaden your understanding of your chosen university field. How does it relate? For example, wider reading, documentaries, workshops, exhibitions etc.

Paragraph Four: What are your skills, experience and achievements so far? Any other achievements you're proud of, positions of responsibility that you hold or have held both in and out of school, and attributes that make you interesting, special or unique? For example, reading buddies, peer mentor, being a member of sixth form head team.

Paragraph Five: What are your hobbies and interests? What have these hobbies taught you? What skills have they helped you develop? (e.g. Teamwork, Communication, Leadership, Public Speaking, Adaptability) This does not have to be course related. Discuss extra-curricular activities not related to the subject directly and include skills developed.

Paragraph Six: Why university? If you know what you'd like to achieve after completing the course, explain how you want to use the knowledge and experience that you gain. How does the course relate to what you want to do in the future?

2.4 How should I write my personal statement?

Remember you only have 4,000 characters so you need to be succinct. Write in an enthusiastic, concise, and natural style – nothing too complex. Make sure your spelling, punctuation and grammar is correct.

Consider the language you are choosing when you are writing your personal statement. You need to make your personal statement positive, below are some phrases to help you create and structure sentences when discussing things that you have been involved in.

• Furthermore	• Responsibility
• Enable Me	• Efficiently
• In addition	• Hard work
• Used my initiative	• Benefit
• Thrive under pressure	• My pursuits
• Strengthen	• Broadening my interest
• Explore my interests	• I aspire to
• Enhanced	• I particularly enjoyed
• Skills I have gained	• My passion for
• The opportunity	• Rewarding
• Participated in	• I continue to develop
• I learnt from	• Combining … with … has taught me
• Taking part in	• Through attending
• Creatively	• This has expanded my knowledge of …
• This has furthered my	• I have acquired the skills which …
• Moreover	• I was determined to …
• Reinforced	• To improve my
• Commitment	• My involvement with …
• Using my initiative	• I believe in
• I undertook	• I am passionate about …

2.6 Summary and Tips:

- Write in an enthusiastic, concise, and natural style – nothing too complex.
- Try to stand out, but be careful with humour, quotes, or anything unusual – just in case the admissions tutor doesn't have the same sense of humour as you.
- No clichés, lists, or unnecessary quotes – the statement should always explain rather than list, quotes must add something to the statement.
- Structure your info to reflect the skills and qualities the universities and colleges value most – use the course descriptions to help you.
- Check the character and line limit – you have 4,000 characters and 47 lines. Some word processors get different values if they don't count tabs and paragraph spacing as individual characters.
- Proofread aloud, and get your teachers, advisers, and family to check. Then redraft it until you're happy with it, and the spelling, punctuation, and grammar are correct.

3. Universities information, courses and open days

3.1 Choosing a Course

It's important you choose a subject you enjoy and will help you reach your goals. Here are some things to help you choose the right subject for you:

- Think about what you enjoy day-to-day – maybe this could be part of a future job role?
- Explore different job sites and graduate career options to look for ideas on what you'd like to do once you've finished your studies.
- Think about your career goals and the qualifications required as part of a person specification.
- Take a look at UCAS subject guides on the UCAS website https://www.ucas.com/explore/subjects to get an idea of the types of subjects you could study, and the industries graduates go on to work in.

3.2 Unifrog https://www.unifrog.org/

Unifrog is on online resource which will help you to explore your key interests and what career paths you can take to reach your goals. The website brings into one place all UK 6th Form courses, apprenticeships, and college courses as well as other opportunities, such as undergraduate university courses, school leaver programmes, Uni accredited free online courses and every college at Oxford and Cambridge. This make it easy for students to compare and choose the best options for further and higher education. You can also explore exciting opportunities further afield by looking at English taught undergraduate programmes available in Europe and the USA.

Additionally, the platform helps you apply for these opportunities by writing personal statements, applications and CVs and guiding you through the process. Your progress can be tracked by your teachers, allowing them to give live feedback.

You should all have a Unifrog login. If you have any problems with accessing your account please email Mrs Williams cw@westage.slough.sch.uk or Mrs Green KLG@westgate.slough.sch.uk

3.3 Open Days and Events

Choosing a university or college is just as important as finding the right subject. With so many different higher education experiences on offer, figuring out where to apply to can be overwhelming. An open day is the best way of getting a real taste of campus life.

As well as getting to see the facilities, an open day is a great opportunity to find out more about the different courses on offer from the people who live and breathe your subject – those who teach and study it, current students and academic staff.

Wherever you decide to study, it's important to do as much research as possible so you make the choice that is right for you.

If you are unable to attend an open day, many universities offer virtual open days. Visit the UCAS website to find a list of universities open days. https://www.ucas.com/ucas/events/find/scheme/virtual-and-digital/type/open-day

4. Other resources to help with your applications

If you require any further guidance or support with your application please talk to your tutor or email Mrs Williams cw@westgate.slough.sch.uk with any questions or concerns.

You can also visit the following websites or undertake the courses outlined below to help you with your university application and preparing for university life.

- ***UCAS Website (www.ucas.com)***

   The UCAS website is a useful resource to help you through the university application process. You can find many guides, tips and worksheets to help you decide on a course and a university, how to make the most of open days, how to prepare and refine your personal statements and managing your finances. It also includes useful information about alternatives to university such as apprenticeships and things to consider if taking a gap year.

- *University of Greenwich Website*

  o *HE Application Journey Course* https://www.gre.ac.uk/for-schools/resources/he-application-journey

    The HE Application Journey is an interactive online tool to help students prepare their UCAS applications. A timeline illustrates the stages of the UCAS application process with useful signposts, hints and tips. The resource is packed with information and activities to help students to research universities and courses, as well as prepare for Open Days. It also contains a useful personal statement tool to help students kick-start writing their personal statement.

  o *Planning My Future Course* https://www.gre.ac.uk/for-schools/resources/planning-my-future

    Planning My Future is an online career-planning course that encourages students to reflect on their skills and abilities in order to identify a pathway to their career. Using the examples of four characters at different stages of education, students are invited to examine a range of different pathways that lead to higher education and their careers. Students are asked to reflect on their skills and abilities and how these will impact on their future careers.

- *The Student Room* https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/content.php?r=3590-university

  The Student Room is committed to helping every student reach their potential in exams and higher education. With a forum full of students, both past and present, who are happy to answer your questions, it's a great place to get some answers. The site also has a personal statement builder, which guides you through the application process, helping you decide what to include and how to structure your statement. It also picks up common mistakes compared with UCAS best practice, so you can just focus on writing a great application.

- ***The Uni Guide*** https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/

  The course finder lets you filter by your preferred subject area and your predicted A-level grades to see what courses are available. Other filters include student satisfaction scores for each university and average graduate salary. Try it out and you might find something you never even knew existed.

- ***Future Learn*** https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/collections/going-to-university?utm_source=FL_blog&utm_medium=Web&utm_campaign=FLChoices

  The courses give you a taster of new subjects, such as computer science, forensics, medicine or dentistry, or help you develop skills for university learning, like critical thinking or research. The University of Sheffield even runs a couple of courses through the website on the university application itself, such as How to Succeed at: Writing Applications and How to Succeed at: Interviews.